

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

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## PROGRESS CONTINUES TOWARD CREATION OF SECOND WHOOPING CRANE FLOCK

Eleven of 15 surviving whooping cranes hatched by greater sandhill crane foster parents in southeastern Idaho since 1975 have returned to summering places in the Rocky Mountains.

Three of the rare birds have been located several miles apart in Wyoming on Green River tributaries not far from Pinedale. The others are in Idaho--one at Kilgore and the remaining seven at adjacent Grays Lake and Bear Lake National Wildlife Refuges near where they were hatched. The refuges lie 75 miles southwest of Jackson Hole, Wyoming. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service scientists are still searching for four more of the cranes which left New Mexico early this spring to migrate north.

At the end of this spring's whooping crane breeding season, none of the foster-reared birds had paired off or nested although two 5-year-old males had established territories--the first indication of reproductive behavior. The exact breeding age of wild whooping cranes is unknown but studies of those in captivity suggest some of the birds are approaching that age. Whether or not they will find and mate with each other remains the unsettled question in the research effort by U.S. and Canadian wildlife officials to create a second flock of wild whooping cranes.

Meanwhile, the number of whooping cranes in the flock is continuing to increase with a helping hand from the Fish and Wildlife Service. By the third week of June, 11 of 14 whooping crane eggs placed in greater sandhill crane nests at Grays Lake National Wildlife Refuge in late May had successfully hatched. A dozen eggs were flown to Idaho from wild nests at Wood Buffalo National Park

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in Canada's remote Northwest Territories. The other two came from the captive breeding flock at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, Maryland. Whooping cranes normally lay two eggs but rear only one chick. Since 1975, most of the "extra" eggs from whooping crane nests in Canada have been taken to Idaho.

A more numerous cousin of the endangered whooper, the sandhill cranes hatch the eggs and care for the young birds. The fledgling whoopers then migrate with their foster parents from Idaho over the Rocky Mountains to New Mexico, stopping at several national wildlife refuges for rest and food along the way.

If the endangered cranes eventually mate with each other and imprint their young with the migration route, a second wild flock will have been created, adding insurance to the great white bird's survival chances.

The only natural wild flock--now numbering 76--nests in Canada and flies 2,500 miles in the fall to Aransas National Wildlife Refuge on the Texas Gulf Coast, returning to Canada each spring. The one-way flight is about three times longer than the 850-mile migration undertaken each fall and spring by the transplanted whooping cranes.

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